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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 /069 W
---------- 081923
P R 301220Z SEP 76
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1925
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 7772

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, MILI, LE, SY
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH ARAB LEAGUE REP DR. HASSAN SABRI AL-KHULI

1. SUMMARY. IN A MEETING WITH CHARGE ON SEPT 29, ARAB LEAGUE REPRESENTATIVE DR. HASSAN SABRI AL-KHULI GAVE HIS VERSION OF SYRIAN ATTACK IN THE METN, CRITICIZED PRESIDENT SADAT'S LEBANESE POLICY AND PRAISED RECENT USG STATEMENTS ON LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

2. CHARGE CALLED ON ARAB LEAGUE REPRESENTATIVE AL-KHULI SEPT 29 GENERAL DISCUSSION OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON.

3. SYRIAN ATTACK IN THE METN. AL-KHULI SAID SYRIAN ATTACK MORNING SEP 28 HAD BEEN LAUNCHED WITHOUT ADVANCE CONSULTATIONS WITH CHRISTIANS, ALTHOUGH THEY HAD BEEN INFORMED JUST PRIOR TO ITS COMMENCEMENT. A SYRIAN EMISSARY TOLD CHRISTIANS
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THEIR PURPOSE WAS TWOFOLD: TO SECURE A ROAD FROM

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DAMASCUS TO JOUNIEH (VIA ZAHLE AND AIN TOURA) THAT
COULD BE KEPT OPEN THIS WINTER, AND TO DRIVE
PALESTINIANS OUT OF THE METN. AL-KHULI SAID THAT
IN HIS VIEW SYRIANS WERE BEHIND ON THEIR TIMETABLE
AND THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO OCCUPY
KEY AREAS WITHIN SIX HOURS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER,
THAT FIGHTING IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN WAS EXTREMELY
DIFFICULT, PARTICULARLY FOR THE ATTACKING FORCE.
AL-KHULI SPECULATED THAT REASON FOR SYRIAN ATTACK
AT THIS TIME WAS TO FRUSTRATE HOLDING OF ARAB
LEAGUE MINI-SUMMIT CONFERENCE THAT HAD BEEN
PLANNED FOR SOMETIME WITHIN NEXT TWO DAYS. HE AGREED
THAT JUNBLATT'S ABSENCE IN CAIRO MAY ALSO HAVE HAD SOME
EFFECT SINCE FUNBLATT WAS MUCH MORE ANXIOUS TO
RETAIN LEFTIST POSITIONS IN HIGH METN THAN PLO.
AL-KHULI DISCOUNTED SEMIRAMIS HOTEL INCIDENT AS A
REASON FOR SYRIAN MOVE. AL-KHULI SAID THAT SHORTLY
AFTER SYRIANS HAD LAUNCHED THEIR ATTACK ON SEPT 28,
THEY HAD INVITED PALESTINIANS TO A MEETING IN SOFAR
TO DISCUSS A CEASE-FIRE. (OTHER SOURCES INDICATE
INITIATIVE FOR MEETING CAME FROM PLO.) THIS MEETING
WAS SCHEDULED FOR 2200 HOURS SEPT 28, BUT WAS POSTPONED
BECAUSE PLO WAS STILL DISCUSSING ITS POSITION.
HE SPECULATED THAT IF FIGHTING ENDS QUICKLY,
ATTACK MIGHT HELP SARKIS BY PRESENTING HIM WITH A
SITUATION IN WHICH IT WILL BE EASIER TO ORGANIZE ROUND-
TABLE TALKS. AL-KHULI COMMENTED THAT ONLY
PALESTINIANS AND SYRIANS CAN STOP THE FIGHTING IN
LEBANON, AND ONLY HE AND SARKIS CAN MAKE THE PEACE.

4. EGYPT'S LEBANESE POLICY: AL-KHULI WAS HIGHLY
CRITICAL OF EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT SADAT'S RECENT POLICY
TOWARDS LEBANON. HE SAID THAT HE HAD ADVISED SADAT
TO FAMILIARIZE HIMSELF WITH LEBANESE PROBLEM BY
INVITING A FEW KEY LEADERS FROM BOTH SIDES TO VISIT
CAIRO; HOWEVER, SADAT HAD SPOILED THE EFFECT BY
INVITING SO MANY. AL-KHULI ALSO CRITICIZED SADAT'S
RECENT OFFER OF ARMS TO SARKIS AS AN EMPTY GESTURE;
WHAT GOOD WERE 50 TANKS TO SARKIS IF THERE WERE NO
CREWS TO MAN THEM? PRESIDENT SARKIS, IN HIS MEETING
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WITH SADAT, ASKED HIM TO PUT PRESSURE ON PALESTINIANS
TO WITHDRAW FROM HIGH METN. WHEN SARKIS WENT INTO
SECOND CHTAURA MEETING, HE THOUGHT THAT THE WORD
HAD BEEN PASSED, AND HE EXPECTED TO FIND ARAFAT MORE
FLEXIBLE. HOWEVER, SADAT HAD NOT MADE ANY MOVE AND
ARAFAT WAS IN FACT TOUGHER. AL-KHULI SAID EGYPT IS
ONLY ARAB COUNTRY WITH POWER TO FORCE A SOLUTION
TO LEBANESE CRISIS.

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5. REACTION TO U.S. STATEMENTS. AT AL-KHULI'S REQUEST, CHARGE GAVE HIM COPY IN ENGLISH OF STATE DEPT POLICY STATEMENT OF SEP 23 ON LEBANON. AL-KHULI SAID THIS STATEMENT HAD BEEN CAREFULLY STUDIED AND VERY WELL RECEIVED BY ALL LEBANESE/PALESTINIAN PARTIES WITH WHOM HE WAS IN CONTACT. HE NOTED THAT STATEMENT WAS CAREFULLY BALANCED AND IN HIS VIEW STRUCK EXACTLY THE RIGHT NOTE AT THIS TIME. HE ALSO MENTIONED THAT ID AL-FITR MESSAGES TO PRIMIN KARAME HAD BEEN INTERPRETED AS USG SUPPORT FOR LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON AND AS GESTURE TOWARDS MOSLEMS. HE SAID EVEN JUNBLATT HAD BEEN PLEASED AND BELIEVED USG WAS NOW PREPARED TO PLAY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN SEEKING PERMANENT SETTLEMENT TO LEBANESE CRISIS.

6. MISCELLANEOUS. AL-KHULI COMMENTED THAT CHAMOUN IS COOPERATING WITH THE SYRIANS, BUT HE DOES NOT TRUST THEM IN THE LONG RUN. HE AGREED THAT CHRISTIANS MIGHT NOT STOP FIGHTING EVEN IF PALESTINIANS AND SYRIANS WORKED OUT A CEASE-FIRE, BUT HE DID NOT THINK CHRISTIANS WOULD ATTACK WEST BEIRUT. THEIR FORCES WERE MILITIA, NOT PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS, AND THEIR LOSSES IN SUCH AN OPERATION WOULD BE VERY HEAVY. HE MENTIONED THAT CHRISTIAN FORCES AT KFAR SHIMA WERE ONLY TWO KILOMETERS FROM HQ OF AL FORCES AT THE AIRPORT, AND HE REALIZED THEY MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO TRY TO TAKE THIS AREA. HE HAD THEREFORE WARNED ALL CHRISTIAN LEADERS THAT IF THEY ATTACKED, ARAB LEAGUE FORCES WOULD DEFEND THEMSELVES AND FIGHT TO THE LAST MAN IF NECESSARY. IF THIS HAPPENED, CHRISTIANS WOULD BE FACING 140 MILLION ARABS.
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7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH DR. AL-KHULI IS CONTINUING HIS CONSULTATIONS WITH ALL PARTIES IN BEIRUT, HE IS INCREASINGLY FRUSTRATED BY HIS INABILITY TO MAKE ANY PROGRESS TOWARDS A CEASE-FIRE. HE HAS FAILED THUS FAR PRIMARILY FOR TWO REASONS: (1) THE ARMED FORCES AT HIS DISPOSAL ARE INADEQUATE TO ENFORE A CEASE-FIRE, AND (2) SYRIANS ARE UNWILLING TO COOPERATE WITH HIM. SYRIAN FONMIN KHADDAM HAS BEEN QUOTED IN BEIRUT PRESS AS STATING THAT AL PEACE-MAKING EFFORT IS NOT SERIOUS AND WILL PRODUCE NOTHING, AND SYRIA HAS SO FAR ACTED TO ASSURE THAT THIS PREDICTION COMES TRUE. SYRIA SEEMS TO BE DETERMINED THAT IF ANYONE MAKES PEACE IN LEBANON IT WILL BE SYRIA, OR ITS CHOSEN INSTRUMENT, SARKIS,

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AND NOT SOME OUTSIDE FORCE SUCH AS EGYPT OR THE
ARAB LEAGUE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONAL OPINION, INTERVENTION, MEETING REPORTS, POLITICAL SITUATION, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BEIRUT07772
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760368-1142
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976094/aaaaadec.tel
Line Count: 172
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 APR 2004 by CollinP0>; APPROVED <13 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEETING WITH ARAB LEAGUE REP DR. HASSAN SABRI AL-KHULI
TAGS: PINS, PINT, MILI, LE, SY, EG, XF, AL, (AL-KHOLI, HASSAN SABRI)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

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